

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

(Continued from Last Week)

... police out to the home of the man who had been arrested. It seems that the state police had taken them to their own homes and allowed one of the men to change his coat before taking him to jail. The local police wanted to search the coat which had been left behind. It was here that the chauffeur had his first idea of planting the evidence. He went to the corner of the paper, and at the man's house managed to slip the newspaper into the pocket of the coat before the police examined it. Later, Slyke's, he threw the little torn

... piece of paper on the floor so that they could find that, too. When he had finished, I wondered the boy had not been right when he thought that the man had been simply fooling him. But if it were true, his story, taken with the drying boards of the chauffeur, would be enough to free the men in prison. I decided to take him with me to the police station and let him tell his story to Roche.

On our arrival in Saratoga we were lucky enough to find both Roche and Black together. Without any comment on my part, I had the boy repeat his story to the two officers. They listened with a good deal of interest. Roche, of course, had handled the robbery, and knew more about it than Black; but Black, I knew, believed at Briffeur was the murderer of Slyke, and the boy's story confirmed my belief.

We debated the story for an hour, Roche taking the view that the chauffeur might have been fooling the boy, and Black that the chauffeur had told the truth and was too drunk to realize what he had said.

Roche clinched his argument by demanding, "Why, under heaven, should he owe Briffeur a large sum of money?"

That was, we all agreed, the weak point in the story.

"My Lord," Roche exclaimed as a thought occurred to him, "do you realize that it was Briffeur that found the torn pieces of cloth on the rose bush, the piece that fitted into the man's pants?"

In astonishment I asked, "It was?"

"It sure was. He came into the police station a few days later with it and told us where he had discovered and asked if we knew what it was. We found later that it fitted into a hole in the pants one of the fellows was wearing."

"Was he ever in the cell with those men?" Black asked, with a glance at me.

"Yes, several times. Slyke asked at we let him go in and talk to me."

Black threw out his hands in disgust. "My G—, Roche, one would think you kept a hotel. You let anyone go in and out that wanted to."

Roche flushed, and replied angrily, "Well, Slyke had lots of pull here,



... why Under Heaven Should Slyke Owe Briffeur a Large Sum of Money?"

"I don't think it did any harm to his chauffeur see those men."

"None," said Black dryly. "It only gave him a chance to snip a piece out of one of the men's trousers."

"That's foolish," Roche laughed.

"Oh, I don't know," was Black's answer. "You can't prove he did not see never saw the piece of cloth unless he brought it in to you. He was in the cell alone with them, and had a chance to cut out the piece of cloth. You can't prove that the chauffeur's story is not true. It fits in better with facts than the evidence that sent those men to jail. But, oh, the easy way you run this jail!"

Roche scowled at us, and was about to retort when he was called from the door. Black and I lit cigars and looked in silence.

"Mr. Pelt," he asked at last, "what do you think of my theory that Briffeur murdered Slyke?"

"I had given little thought to the matter, and said as much. Black surprised me by adding, "You know that doctor King and the district attorney think that the only verdict that can be brought in in the Slyke case is

Black's remarks astonished me. True, I realized that it was almost impossible to present convincing legal proof that Slyke had been murdered, but there was still the chauffeur's death to be explained. If he had been killed, as Bartley thought, because he knew too much about Slyke's death, then it seemed to me that to bring in a verdict of suicide would be impossible. I told Black of my objection, and he agreed with me.

Then he reiterated his belief in Briffeur's guilt. According to him, the story the chauffeur told the boy fitted in well with his own theory. True, there was little to base it on, so far as evidence went; but, assuming that Slyke and the chauffeur had quarreled about money, his strongest bit of evidence was Briffeur's coming to the vault where the missing revolver was hidden. No one else, so far as we knew, had quarreled with Slyke, or had any reason for wanting to kill him. Black explained the chauffeur's death by saying Miss Potter had killed him. I told him this last disproved his first theory, that whoever had killed the chauffeur had done so because he knew too much about Slyke's death.

I found that it was nearly four o'clock, and as I had had no luncheon I decided to get something to eat before Bartley's train came in. Just as I reached the door Black called after me, "Say, Pelt, what does your chief want us all over for, to Slyke's tonight?"

This was the first time that I had heard we were expected to go there; and, seeing my astonishment, he added that Bartley had sent word for Roche and himself to be at Slyke's promptly at eight o'clock. I was forced to admit that I did not know as much about it as he did.

I went to a little tea room on the main street, and had almost finished my meal when someone called my name, and a reporter from the Record, whom I knew, rose and joined me. He mentioned the Slyke case and said that everyone was waiting for Bartley to "spring something." He complained that there was little enough information to be gotten about it. All he had been able to do had been to interview the men that had been at Slyke's home the night of his death. One of them told him, however, that three or four times during the evening Slyke had tried to reach someone on the phone—just who, he did not know.

I had now barely time to reach the station before Bartley's train pulled in, and I bade him a hurried farewell.

As Bartley and I drove down the main street of Saratoga, he said, "By the way, Pelt, stop at a store and get me five slates."

"Five what?" I asked.

He grinned. "Five slates. The kind used years ago in school. I want them all the same size."

He threw back his head and laughed. "They are usually used to write on, Pelt, but you will find out tonight what I want them for."

I stopped at a little stationery store, and returned in a moment with five slates. As I was getting back into the car, I remembered what the reporter had told me about Slyke's trying to get someone on the telephone, and I repeated his story to Bartley. He said nothing for a moment, then asked me to drive to the telephone exchange. He spent ten minutes in the building; and, when he came out, he seemed well pleased with his visit but did not mention its result.

As we drove along I told him the boy's story. When I had finished he smiled. "I believe the chauffeur told the boy the truth. He had been drinking, but that is when a man often speaks the truth."

I glanced at him to see if he were in earnest, and he nodded. "Yes, I am serious. Briffeur had broken into Slyke's house. He never spoke of this crime, but he thought a good deal about it. When he got drunk, his subconscious mind told the secret that he was trying to hide. I believe that what Briffeur said was the truth about the robbery."

"But why should he try to rob Slyke?" I asked.

"I am not sure. My theories are beginning to make a more or less connected whole, but there are still some gaps to be bridged."

Currie heard the car as it stopped before the house and came out to greet Bartley. As Mrs. Currie was in town, we did not change for dinner. During the meal the murder was not mentioned. Bartley went to his room immediately afterward. I sat with Currie for a while, smoking; then I excused myself. I was eager to learn what Bartley had discovered in New York. I found him in his room, stretched out in a big armchair, one leg thrown over its arm, his pipe in his mouth. As I watched him I thought how little one would suppose that he was engaged in solving two mystifying murders. He looked up as I entered, smiled, and went back to his reading.

"How did your trip come off?" I asked.

"Well, Pelt," he drawled, as he placed his long yellow-covered book on the floor, "Arentino certainly knew the criminal life of his day."

His remark had, of course, to do with the book that he had been reading, and nothing with my question. Seeing my disappointment, he laughed. "The trip wasn't of much importance. The man did buy the whiskey from Slyke. He had bought all that was in the vault, but had only removed one truck load when he was caught. He paid \$28,000 for it that afternoon, and left on the seven

o'clock train for New York. His alibi is perfect; he knows nothing about the murder. The alibi of the men on the truck also is perfect. They did not reach Saratoga until noon on the day after Slyke's death. They dealt only with one man."

"One man?" I echoed. "Who?"

He watched my face for a moment, then replied simply, "Briffeur!"

I had half expected that answer. It made the chauffeur's story that Slyke owed him money seem reasonable. It even hinted that the chauffeur had tried to blackmail Slyke, and made Black's theory that Briffeur had killed Slyke seem not unreasonable.

"The men on the truck," Bartley continued, "did not know Briffeur's name; but their description of the man who unlocked the door of the vault for them fitted Briffeur."

"But—" I ventured.

"But what?" he countered.

"That connects Slyke and Briffeur." He was silent for a moment, his face grave. Then he said slowly, "Yes, Pelt, it does. If the chauffeur had not been killed himself, he would be suspected of causing Slyke's death. But there is one thing—"

"And what is that?" I asked eagerly.

"Briffeur said some one else was implicated in that robbery. What I want to know is, who was that other man?" He paused, then added: "There is no doubt, Pelt, that Slyke had been selling whiskey for some time. Where he got it, and who was in on it with him, we don't know. Maybe tonight we can find out."

Currie's voice called from below that the car was waiting to take us to Slyke's house, and we rose. As I started for the door, Bartley handed me a package and gave me a playful shove.

"Don't drop them," he laughed.

CHAPTER XIII

Out of the Darkness.

The butler seemed to expect us, and showed us at once into the large room in which the inquest had been held. Bartley placed his bag and the package of slates on a small table in the center of the room, Roche sat down heavily in a chair, and the rest of us stood until Miss Potter entered. She seemed to be expecting us also, and for the first time, since I had met her, seemed almost at her ease. As she greeted us, the bell rang, and a moment later the butler ushered in Doctor King. He glanced at Bartley, then gave us all a word of greeting.

We seated ourselves around the table with the exception of Bartley, who remained standing at one end. He was a different Bartley from the one who had laughed and joked with us during the past few days. His face was stern, and his tired eyes glanced from one to the other of us soberly. The butler brought in a glass of water and placed it on the table.

Bartley waited until he had left the room again before he spoke, his voice low and hesitating:

"I have brought you here tonight at Miss Potter's request. She believes that it is possible to get in touch with the spirits of the dead, and that we may receive a message from Mr. Slyke that will tell us who killed him. She has asked us to be present as witnesses."

Currie looked at me as if he thought that Bartley had gone crazy. I was too surprised to offer an excuse. A glance at Bartley showed that he was in earnest, and I sank back in my chair bewildered. I knew that he did not believe in spiritualism, though he was familiar with the question from all sides and had made a special study of it. I was puzzled as to why he should stoop to this pretense. Doctor King seemed more surprised than any of us; after a startled look at Bartley, he shrugged his shoulders and whispered something to Roche, who in turn shook his head.

"While I was in New York," Bartley continued, "I arranged for a certain medium, who is claimed to have had wonderful results, to meet us here tonight. I did not tell him what we expected, or anything about the circumstances. He will be here in

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He Was Silent for a Moment, His Face Grave. Then He Said Slowly, "Yes, Pelt, It Does—"

I gave him a disgusted look. "But these are the slates."

"So they are, but they may talk for us tonight."

And with that absurd suggestion in my ears, I went down the stairs to join Currie.

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